THE SOUND OF SUNDAY

by Kerima Polotan-Tuvera

IT WAS HER DAY for meeting old friends. Emma Gorrez had ventured out twice before this, to school and to Martinez Kiosk, but she had met no one she knew. Even the woman behind the books at the Kiosk did not remember her. Emma had lingered longer than she should, five, ten minutes longer, although there had been nothing of interest to hold her to this spot where she had bumped into Doming several years ago. That time, he had stood at the rack, thumbing through a book; when their looks had met, he had bowed slightly.

He had bowed too in their room two weeks ago, one night after a wearying fight. He would hear no more from her, and he had cut short their argument with one vicious swing of his fist against the bedroom wall. No tears, none, except the audible panting of their selves, like two runners come to the end of a race. He had bowed, holding his head in his hands. This was how married people fought, she had thought—like complete strangers, with anger pulsing in the air between them.

That day in the Kiosk, wondering where he was and what he did while she stood three hundred kilometers away, she thought then that if he returned, if she should see him suddenly looming in the doorway, if he strode in, scowling or not, loving her or not, she would run to him, and it would not matter that they had hurt each other terribly. But only the rain fell outside the Kiosk entrance. Doming had not appeared; no one she knew had appeared, not the girl at the bookstore who tapped her fingers impatiently. Emma threw the book down and hurried home.

She had also gone to Mr. Rividad to see about her old job. She had written to say she was coming, but the first thing she saw when she pushed the familiar batwing doors was her letter resting casually above his glass top, unopened. It had seemed like a rebuff. Even the information that he was out of town did not help.

But on this day, she ran into them all. She had not taken the first turn on Tanedo Street when Mrs. Pintoy sprang from behind the corner. She made an expansive gesture, opening and closing her mouth, unable to speak, until Emma dragged her to a table at De Luxe. Then Mrs. Pintoy's torrent of words came, and Emma stopped her ears, pretending to be displeased but actually happier than she had been since she had left Domingo Gorrez in Sampaloc.

She met Rene Rividad outside Plaridel High School. "Three years," he said, taking her hand. "Will you take me back?" she asked. He stood, shifting his weight from one foot to the other, trying to veil his thoughts. "In all ways," he smiled. "You have learned how to make beautiful speeches," she said. "And you—what did the city teach you?"

Emma Gorrez ignored the question. She would not do her remembering this way, outside in the street, beneath a hot sun, before the searching eyes of this thin, greying man who had once said he loved her. He did not ask her about Doming, and she volunteered no news except that he was well.

She met Norma Rividad, too, swinging her potent hips up the street. Mr. Rividad's wife made her way, unseeing, to the bus stop, there to wait for the next Pantranco bus to Dagupan. That hadn't changed, Emma thought, passing her by.

But many other things in Tayug had. The snakes in the plaza were dead, and their wired cage had been taken over by a pair of deer, captured in the hills nearby. They limped about, dragging themselves around the enclosure, looking up with accusing eyes when Emma approached to throw them bits of grass.

The shanties on Tanedo had been torn down to give way to sturdier buildings, and now they lifted their falsely modern facades to the sun. Towards the railroad station, two moviehouses had been erected, and their faulty sound systems pierced the air at noon. Together, with the twelve o'clock whistle, sonorous declarations of love and anger straddled the town.

"I LOVE YOU! I hate you!" came the screams, and the echoes would carry to the periphery of the town. It lasted for hours. Emma Gorrez, the first day she heard it, shut the windows of the old house. It did not keep the voices away.

Some of the stridency did not reach her, with the windows shut and her ears plugged with cotton, but the echoes persisted. Emma would gather the children in the room farthest from the noise, reading stories from books salvaged from the wreck of the Gorrez marriage.

Emma Gorrez had been strong for both of them, and yet the marriage had come apart. It was difficult to understand. They had loved each other through the various crises of their married life—the times when he had chucked jobs and walked out of agreements and turned his back on decisions. Even that terrible time with the Cosios had drawn them together. The business blowing up in their faces like that—they had left Tayug, lured by the Cosios' promises of friendship, and set up the press, and gone through the harrowing months when both the business and the friendship wavered, and finally the nearly fatal end. Emma had wrecked the Glockner and turned upon Nora, holding Nora's slim, well-tended hand beneath the blade of the huge cutter. But someone, Isabelo or Paco or Domingo himself—she never afterwards asked who—kicked the plug away and slapped Emma and Nora down. That was all.

Emma did not go back to the press again. She left Domingo Gorrez to pick up the pieces, and this, he did admirably. This man whose dark moods she could not completely grasp charmed them out of the frightful mess her foolish rage had plunged them both into, and the Cosios had been amenable to letting them go since they were themselves not too eager for a scandal.

Perhaps it was from that moment the marriage began to go. Emma Gorrez wanted to return to Tayug. Doming would not hear of it. To her pleas that they would feel safer in the old town, Doming snorted. No one was safe anywhere, Doming said. Life waited for a man's unguarded moments, and there were plenty, he said.

"We're staying, Em," he said. "I'll get a job. Then we'll show this place a thing or two," he said.

After that, Doming had simply walked into Quality Products, bluffing his way to a desk in the Public Relations department. It meant doing all the things that Emma despised. He slid into it smoothly, effortlessly, wearing the

inevitable shirt sleeves and thin tie. When he left the house, Emma would watch him go—it was not like those mornings in Tayug when she had stepped back while he drove the jalopy out of the yard. There had been the assurance of things familiar; the hills looked down benignly upon them, and benevolence enwrapped them all surely, Doming, Emma, and the life in her womb.

But in the city, she watched him go into a world that repelled her. He returned each night speaking the jargon of the trade and donning the jesting attitudes fashionable among his friends. It was not a life worth living, and she tried to reach him. In the high, airless room of the Sampaloc apartment house, she spoke from the depths of her blanket at night. "This is not what we want," she said.

The passing cars cast strange, grotesque shadows on the wall, lighting up with criss-crossing forms the peeling blue paint of the bedroom. He replied with a groan. He did not like arguing over an unrealized peril. But when she was insistent, when she talked yearningly of returning to Tayug, to all that she felt was meaningful to both of them, then he replied, in monosyllables at first, hoping to discourage her, but finally in long, passionate statements full of his desire to conquer this city which had humiliated him twice.

"We want the things that will last," she said. "The money lasts. You like the money, don't you?" he asked. "I don't deserve that," she said. "Em, Em," he said, in a voice approximating the old tenderness. "You are the child, not I. You see ghosts where there are none." "You can't go on plotting and tricking forever, buying respectability for Big Man in Quality."

He knew what she was talking of. "It was a test of skill," he recalled. "I liked pitting myself against a real foe," he laughed. "That old man," she flung at him. "He was seventy. If nothing else, he had earned the right to die with his illusions: honor, courage, honesty..."

Mr. Navarro had come knocking at their door one evening, an old man in threadbare, baggy pants. His daughter had worked at Quality, a silly girl, of whom perhaps it was true what they had all said later, that she deserved what she had gotten in the suffocating office elevator, tragically stalling between floors

one twilight. Stumbling, panic-stricken, out of the cold, steel box, babbling hysterically of an attack perpetrated by Number 2, the executive who loved pastel-colored shirts and who gobbled fruit pies greedily at the office canteen. Mr. Navarro had stormed the offices of Quality, demanding a form of redress that took everyone aback because it did not include the consideration of money. He wanted to send Number 2 to jail. Nothing that they could say or offer could deter him. It was a most fundamental sort of outrage, and he demanded a most fundamental sort of satisfaction: the sight of Lopez behind bars.

The legal force could not touch it. There were all kinds of predictions, oh, the various fateful ramifications of that single, senseless act. Stocks plummeting, faces lost, an entire business built upon the goodwill of a people (who had been led to believe that Quality employed only God-fearing men) going up in smoke because this chit of a girl disdained payment.

Until Doming had stepped into the fray, bringing the inimitable charm of his father's son to bear upon the old man. Gorrez had invited Navarro to the house where, willingly and gladly, Navarro had gone because Gorrez had spoken his dialect and had used its native diphthongs well.

"Yes, Grandfather?" Gorrez had cajoled. "A little talk about your problem? Supper, and the sight of my children, and my wife, a fine woman, and my guarantee that nothing I might propose to you will mean disgrace. Yes, Grandfather?"

Navarro had wobbled from the bus stop to the house of the Gorrezes, trapped by his own bewilderment and shame. When Doming was through with him, you could not see any mortal wounds. They were where no human eyes could see them: in the heart that must have bled quietly to death because, fed and warmed and made much of, Navarro had allowed himself to leave the Gorrez house with a check. He had killed himself later. A week after the funeral, the check had returned by mail, torn into filmy, tiny bits.

For a long time afterwards, Emma Gorrez would not allow Doming to touch her. Quality had given him a good bonus, a raise, a larger desk, and his own name in black, glossy letters upon an opaque door. Emma would not spend the

new sum, but Doming brought it all to her, again and again and again, until she finally took it. She went to the most expensive store in town and spent it on things that in her sober moments she would not have dreamt of buying. When she stepped out of the store onto the sidewalk, a pile of packages beside her, she looked up at the sun, but the sun was not there, only a vague, diffused terror, peculiar because it frightened her no longer. The memory of that trembling old man did not hurt her anymore, and she said to herself, flagging a cab, this was corruption.

In their room, she spelled the word for him, and Domingo Gorrez laughed. Emma lay back in her bed, watching the headlights momentarily illuminating the darkness upon the wall. The feeling that God vouchsafed a man—pain and joy, love and lust—they were like the lights upon the wall. You knew an instant of pain or joy or love or desire, and you were never the same again because the darkness inside yourself had known so much brief illumination. And at the end of it all, what? A gentle discernment, a manner of soft speech and belief, belief.

"We're all in fragments," she said to Doming another time. "And I want us both whole. Complete." He had pulled desk drawers open, searching heatedly for something she did not guess until he threw it at her—the dark-green, compact bankbook filled with deposits. It was as if he had said something obscene, and she knew then that she would have to leave him.

"I am all here!" Doming announced, thumping himself on the chest. "All here!" She shook her head. "No, you're not—you were easier to love before. Do you remember yourself then, Doming?" she asked. "You were a good man," she said simply.

The money, the ease, the new status, had come to them, and they had ceased being themselves. That was the core of their dilemma: to go through the streets of the city and not lose their innocence, not to be warped and twisted into the ugly form of city folk.

"We could live in Tayug quietly and modestly," she said. "You would not have to arrange people's lives for them." "You and your airs!" he snarled. "Everyone's doing it, but you're better than everyone. There's never any doubt in

your mind about yourself, is there, Emma? You say a thing is so, and it is so, because Emma says it is so. How can you bear to live with someone like me, Em? I don't want to go to heaven..."

At the bus station where they had gone three mornings afterwards, they stood uncomfortably until the familiar 812 pulled in and began to load up. "Will you write?" he asked. She nodded. "You don't have to go, Em. None of this has to happen," he said. But the children were scrambling up the vehicle, and they waited for their mother, who turned now swiftly on her heels and climbed up. She had touched Doming quickly on the cheek and said something that the bus, starting all at once, had drowned.

When they pulled away, she held her grief-washed face above her sons' heads. She hoped Doming would wonder what it was she had whispered. She had said, "Love. Love."

DOMING, SHE WROTE from Tayug, what does a man work for? Is it not for a corner and a moment to be tender in? Outside the door, beyond the gate, there, it is always a rush to get to somewhere where there is finally nothing. We spin like tops, straining for what will nourish and serve us. We think we know what we want, and we chase it, but when its hood falls off, it is the macabre face of death... I have left you because I cannot live without you. That is a statement that should do your department at Quality proud. You turn out platitudes like that at assembly-line speed, but do you honor them? You buy and sell beliefs, you buy and sell sensibilities, and, of course, in the final analysis, you buy and sell people...

His answer was full of newsy bits: the neighbors had asked for her but were not overly curious. He might trade in the car for a two-toned mauve. Big Man had bought a two-toned mauve; mauve was the latest hue of success. They were paneling the conference room at last. There was a sale of pin-striped Van Heusens at his favorite store...

He can get along without me, she thought bitterly.

Nobody asked why she had returned to Tayug. Everyone presumed that Domingo Gorrez would follow in a short while. Even after she had begun to

teach again at Plaridel High, she heard nothing to indicate that people were wondering why she and her two sons lived by themselves. It was the quiet and modest life that she had wanted. Each day, she walked the boys to the primary school building atop Manresa Knoll and then turned downhill again towards the high school. At a certain point, she could see the depot where Doming had worked before. The derricks were still there, stark against the sky.

On her way home in the afternoon, she looked in on the deer. The Rizal statue near the patio, religiously white-washed by town officials, lifted unwearied arms still burdened with ageless overcoat and books.

"You would think," Mr. Rividad said, catching up with her one afternoon, "that he had seen nothing at all."

Forty years before, his father had led an abortive insurrection—two hundred people had perished, strewn all over the plaza. His own mother, three months pregnant, had died at the foot of the statue, one bullet through her heart, her rough hands grasping the folds of a flag she had fashioned in the ravines of the Mangatarem mountains where they had gone to organize. "They had sent me away before that," Mr. Rividad had told Emma the story that first year she had come out to this town. "And when I saw them again, it was here among the hedges." They were dead, and he, the fifteen-year-old son of Amang, was not. At the sound of gunfire earlier that day, he had run to the plaza where the people had said the Colorums were and found his parents sprawled like that. They would not let him bury them. The officer who had shot his mother had approached and said, "Go home, kid."

I am their son, he wished to answer, but no one had paid him any attention. He had lived with that guilt. He had left town for years, studied in the city, returning to set up the high school. And then he had lived with another kind of guilt; he was living with it still, in fact—his wife, Norma Rividad, sick with a greed he could not satisfy, meeting strange men in strange rooms in strange towns.

"He has seen everything," Mr. Rividad went on, falling in step with Emma Gorrez. The wind from the hills was sweeping out to sea. "Everything," Rividad

repeated. They looked at each other. Her own sons would be at home, waiting for her, but here she lingered, glancing at this old friend's face. Did he mean everything? That twilight they had both stood in the plaza five years ago, watching the schoolgirls playing on the grass, two weeks before her impulsive marriage to Domingo Gorrez. Mr. Rividad had blurted out a few words that had brought down upon both of them a delicate, enveloping silence.

"...only the brief, timid pleasure," he had said, speaking slowly, painfully, "...letting you know...what harm can it do now?...you're marrying Gorrez. I cannot stop that...and soon another complete, self-contained bubble on the face of the earth...the sounds of Sunday joy: baby in the crib, pot upon the stove, rain on the roof, and large warm bed beckoning in the corner..."

THE PUBLIC RELATIONS department of Quality Products, Incorporated occupied a whole suite on the seventh floor of the Zenith Building in Plaza Tanduay. The Zenith was one of those modern, spare designs, seemingly fragile, rising on stilts. Row on row of cobweb-windows dazzled the passerby. Three cobweb windows belonged to Domingo Gorrez, who now drew a monthly pay in four digits, not including allowances.

When Ernesto Bello, chief plotter, was out of town, Gorrez called the shots: it was his voice, coming over the intercom set, that sent them all skittering over the well-sanded floor of the PR suite. Heads were constantly being chopped off, in a manner of speaking, but Bello and Gorrez held on to theirs, although grapevine had it that more than once in the past, conflicting ambitions had nearly precipitated an open break. But both knew better than to court disaster. They were favorites of Big Man, who played the game so dexterously that neither knew who was favored more. It was one way of ensuring loyalty. They were loyal to the boss, to-the-death loyal, Gorrez particularly.

Before their estrangement, Doming gleefully brought to Emma the latest news of Big Man's current playmate. Each night, as soon as he had loosened his tie and kicked off his shoes, Doming would give her the latest communique: "Emma, it's Ruby Trias of Accounting this time." Or Fely Barba of Files. Or Mercedes Sulit of Copy. They were all the same to Emma Gorrez—hungry, eager

young girls, fresh from college, their foolish little heads filled with sleek magazine stuff. Whoever it was Big Man fancied slipped each noon into Domingo Gorrez's room "to nap"—while in the office adjoining, the boss sat, licking his chops, his limbs trembling with ague and desire. Fifteen minutes later, after a sufficiently refreshing nap, the connecting door between Gorrez's and the boss's rooms would open. It was a door everyone well knew was there but no one mentioned. At Cafe Luxaire, Gorrez asked for a second cup of coffee, sometimes a third, stood to make a phone call to his desk, noted the busy signal, smiled, and took his time.

You could always tell, said Domingo to his wife, who had done pretty well by herself. Three or four weeks afterwards, someone was certain to be sporting a diamond ring. One girl had built a summer house for a sick father, in addition to the sparkler on her finger. Mina, the knowing minx, had demanded to be sent to Hong Kong several times, from where she had returned loaded to the ears with luxury goods which she peddled at tremendous profit to the other girls in the lunchroom—bags, cashmere sweaters, and silks. Squealing excitedly, the girls fought for the privilege of being listed in Mina's ledger, a brown, hardbound book she carried all over PR twice a month, into whose pages she wrote names and debts.

There were the office parties. Big Man honored all office parties with his presence. Executives 1 to 10 came, bourbon under their arms. Skull caps were passed around. Music was loud, laughter raucous. At that party celebrating the defeat of the strikers against Quality, the boss danced with all the wives, including Emma Gorrez. Including Mrs. Testa, whose husband had led the strike. Mrs. Testa had not been invited to the party on the Zenith roof garden, but she had come just the same to plead for her husband's job back. Big Man had not known who she was. He was whirling her around in a fast rhumba and was probably toying with the idea of asking her to nap in Gorrez's room when a man's angry hand cut his pleasure short.

There was Testa, in a sweat-stained polo shirt, three days' beard on his chin. He had led the strike and lost, and here, gathered for a victorious evening,

were the enemy. Delio, Gorrez, Heyas, Paez, the whole necktied bunch, who had pledged support, and then sold him out. Testa took his wife by the elbow, smiling crazily, and walked to his friends and shook their hands, solemnly, ceremoniously, saying something that froze the joy in their faces.

"What did he say?" Emma asked Doming on their way home that night. "Doming?" The bastard, Doming had muttered under his breath. The goddamn son of a bitch, Doming had cursed, shifting gears. "What did he say?" Something Latin, replied Gorrez. "Latin?" Yeah, Gorrez said drunkenly, stepping on the gas, swinging the car around a curve. Morituri te Salutamus.

Gorrez's role in the ill-starred strike had not been as villainous as Bello's, but it had been wicked enough. Bello had done the dirty job, worming his way into the strikers' confidence, listing a few personal grievances himself, lending his name to the manifesto. But Bello had not marched with them into Big Man's office. When Testa and the rest of the boys had walked in, Bello was already there, behind the boss' bar, mixing himself a drink.

But Doming could have swung it for Testa, had he been so minded. "Well, Gorrez?" Big Man had asked. "What do you think?" Doming had picked up the demands. He could have helped the boss to see how things really were. Quality stocks were up a hundred per cent, provincial outlets were never better, public relations was going great guns, a few raises would not have hurt. Why, the old goat spent more for those brief contraband moments in Gorrez's office. But Big Man's steely gaze did not once leave Domingo Gorrez's face, which blanched and burned by turns. Hell, Gorrez had thought, life was rough all around.

"I shrugged my shoulders," he told Emma later. Emma pushed him away. "But don't you see?" he had asked. "I should ask you that," she said. "Everything led to that one moment, Doming. You could have redeemed yourself. You could have done the right thing. But a shrug is a smart reflex, it comes with half a dozen others in a handy kit they distribute among today's bright boys... Are you sure," she asked aloud, "are you sure pimping is all you do for him?"

Emma felt Doming's blow even before it landed on her cheek.

SHE felt it again, sitting with Rene Rividad one Saturday at a table in De

Luxe.

In Tayug, on Saturdays, there was nothing to do but walk around town. After you had seen the deer and the patio, you invariably dropped in at the restaurant and took one of its battered tables and ordered coffee. The beverage came, strong and steaming, in a thick wet cup, and when she remembered food, she asked for a roll and speared it with a fork. She was doing just that one afternoon when Rene Rividad walked in and took the chair across from her.

She did not ask, but she knew, instinctively, what he was there for. The last bus from Dagupan came at 7 past. He would wait for that and go through the farce of welcoming Norma Rividad from one of her trips. He would then take her home—it was an act of kindness.

Emma and Mr. Rividad were comfortable together, making small talk. He asked her how she found the students these days? She asked him if he went often to Mrs. Pintoy? He told her that Plaridel was beginning to attract people from Balungao; they had twenty students from that town this year. She told him that the Gorrez tenants from Anonas had descended on her one morning, bringing chickens, fruits, and eggs, asking about Apo Laureano's son, Doming. They wanted to know when he was arriving. With the drought, it was not easy to grow a pig.

"What did you tell them?" Mr. Rividad asked her. He spooned some sugar into his coffee and held the milk can over it until the liquid turned white. "Didn't you get enough milk as a baby?" she teased. He laughed with her. She noticed his fingers. They were long, nicotine-stained, square-tipped fingers. They shook perceptibly. "A nervous illness," he explained, spreading his hand over the table. "Happiness just barely misses my grasp, you know." Emma Gorrez said, "Who has taught you to make pretty speeches?" "And who has taught you to ignore questions?" he asked. "What question?" "When is Doming coming home?" "I don't know," she said frankly. Doming had stopped writing. The money came regularly, twice a month. In the beginning, there had been notes. Three or four times saying hello and asking if the kids were well. But they had stopped. The money orders were reaching her now with nothing more than a clerk's letter,

typed neatly and sparingly: Dear Mrs. Gorrez, Please acknowledge enclosed sum.

"We're living apart, Rene," she said. "For a little while, I hope. We had some differences," she ended lamely. She looked at Mr. Rividad's hands once more and remembered Doming's palm against her face.

Mr. Rividad glanced at his watch and said, "Norma will be here soon." They stood up and together waited on the sidewalk outside of De Luxe. There was the red Pantranco, easing itself into the parking lot across the street. "She always comes home," he said.

It was two Saturdays later when they met again, and Emma could not tell if it was by design or not. Like that earlier Saturday, Rividad walked in, and Emma's heart lifted at the sight of him. They saw each other in school, but there was no time to talk, and there were always too many people. At De Luxe, it was different. A public eating place, in the heart of town, five minutes away from the church pulpit where Father Tomas weekly exhorted them to shy at sin.

There was nothing wrong in sitting and talking, several tables away from Mrs. Furay's cashbox. Lean one's head against the hard wood of Mrs. Furay's grimy restaurant wall, and talk. Bring the coffee to one's mouth, sip and swallow, and talk. Tell of the business that went ph-f-f-f-t. Tell of city lights and city loneliness. Tell of Big Man, Bello, Mina the minx. Tell of the strike, tell of Testa, tell of the boss' "naps." Tell of Navarro, beyond whom no treachery more terrible was possible—so that when the time came to tell of her parting from Doming, Emma spoke in a measured, reminiscent tone, as if she was telling the story, not of herself, but of some old friends she had wished well a long time ago.

"They had everything when they started, Rene. Youth, good looks, courage. Where did all that go?" Mr. Rividad smoked quietly across from her. "You remember saying once, 'The sounds of Sunday joy'...?" He nodded, smiling suddenly. "Yes, but there are other days in the week. And other sounds." "Oh, no!" she said, in mock pleasure. "You are not wooing me, are you?" she asked lightly. "And if I am?" he asked, matching her mood. "Norma will be here

soon," she said. "I am not waiting for Norma this time," Mr. Rividad said quietly.

It was not Norma he waited for on all the other days that he and Emma Gorrez met in the restaurant. The last bus from Dagupan would drive in; still, Rene Rividad sat glued to his chair, smoking interminably, waiting for Emma to be done with her stories, or telling some of his own. Did she hope to escape unscathed? Back of her mind, a knell sounded, foreshadowing anguish. Some affection was bound to spill over, sitting with Mr. Rividad like that, talking intimately with him, but Emma was summoned to that table every Saturday at sunset by a voice stronger than her wisdom.

Her sons would be in the yard, playing, when she passed them. Hair pulled back, face clean of powder and lipstick, she wore the simplest clothes to those meetings. She took a long, circuitous route, looking in on every store on Tanedo, crossing over to Luna Street for a leisurely-spaced walk beneath the trees. But as soon as the sun was gone, her feet took her to De Luxe. With a will all their own, they bore her, despite herself, to where Mr. Rividad was waiting. Sometimes, she fought the wish to see him. Deliberately, she sat on a bench in the plaza, telling herself it was not important if he was there or not.

One day, she sat longer than she had intended. When she stood up, it was evening. A desire to weep possessed her. He had probably not waited, and it was an eternity to the next Saturday. She began to hurry. At the second corner, she ran, forgetting everything else. When she reached the lighted door of the restaurant, she saw him at the table, a sad, hurt, puzzled look on his face. She stepped in quickly and said, "You are here." "Would you have wanted me to go?" "No," she said. It was a bold thing to say; it was a perilous thing to say. She felt her defenses go: such a brief word, yet it stripped her completely.

He looked at her. "May I wait for you here on Saturday?" She did not meet his gaze. "Dear Emma," he said suddenly. "Don't." Why had she let this man become important to her? "Em—" he had never called her that before. "I would like to wait for you," he continued softly, "here, and in all the places you can possibly think of, for all the hours life will allow me." "Don't do this to me,

Rene," she begged. "Are you afraid?" "This is catastrophe," she said. "Are you afraid?" he insisted. She nodded dumbly.

"Let me give you strength," he said. She looked at him now. Five years ago, as earnestly as now Rividad leaned across the table, Domingo Gorrez had leaned across another table and pleaded as Rividad pleaded today. What had happened to that earlier love? She had wanted that more than anything else; she had wanted that to last, but it had gone because—she had tried too hard, and Doming, too little? Could you kill love with a surfeit of loving? In the happier days, discovering each other for the first time, Doming had spoken as gently as this man: "Em," he had said once, "your hands within my hands—" Some poetry he had learned in college: Your hands within my hands are deeds; my tongue upon your throat; singing arms close; eyes wide, undoubtful, dark, drink the dawn—a forest shudders in your hair!

Emma Gorrez let her head fall back against the wall. She closed her eyes. A tremor shook her. I wish I could cross over to the safer side of today, she thought. I wish I could go back to the plaza, to half an hour ago, beneath the trees, in the thickening dark, where I mused, lonely, and afraid, but not this afraid. This man asked me would I have wanted him to go, and I said No, and it was like a dam breaking, like a wall giving way, and here I bob in the flotsam, not wanting to save myself. I am being swept awash, the shore is near, one step, and I am on safe ground, but I do not wish to go ashore.

"And Norma?" she said aloud. "Am I to be like Norma after all?" she asked unhappily. "You are not Norma," he said, "there is a difference." "Difference?" she asked. "A big difference," he said. "You are Emma. And I love you."

They sat in silence, the cups between them. Perhaps, I could love him, she thought. The jukebox in the corner began to sing softly. Perhaps, I love him already, she thought. Over the cliff, ah! down the precipice, and sweet disaster.

She had run away from violence only to meet it here in this quiet, empty restaurant, with the electric fan whirling overhead and Mrs. Furay dozing near her cashbox.

The joys of Sunday seemed far away now. The licit sounds of happiness

had slid past her. She had loved Domingo Gorrez with everything that she had been, but they had been careless, and one paid for carelessness like this—sipping coffee in exile, vulnerable, tremulous because, in this wayward inn, someone had said a warm and tender thing.